

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 01307 140530Z  
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
ICA-11 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 AID-05 NEA-10 SES-02  
SAA-01 ARA-11 /114 W  
-----001888 150621Z /20

R 131500Z SEP 78  
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1083  
INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS  
AMEMBASSY LOME  
AMEMBASSY CONAKRY  
AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN  
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY DAKAR

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1307

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINS, PINR, DM, NI,  
SUBJ: OBASANJO VISIT TO BENIN SEPT 9-11

1. OBASANJO "OFFICIAL FRIENDLY" VISIT WAS ESSENTIALLY A PUBLIC DISPLAY OF HOW BENIN AND NIGERIA ARE DRAWING CLOSER TOGETHER, HOW THEY WANT TO EASE CONTACTS ACROSS BORDER, AND TO MOVE FORWARD ON JOINT PROJECTS WHICH NIGERIA CAN FINANCE THAT BENEFIT COMMERCIAL SECTORS OF BOTH COUNTRIES. IT WAS WARM AND IMPRESSIVE ON PROTOCOL AND ATMOSPHERICS AND SEEMED AIMED AT SETTING THE STAGE PUBLICLY FOR STEPS ALREADY TAKEN (IN SECURITY AREA) OR TO BE TAKEN (PERHAPS IN CLOSER POLITICAL COORDINATION) TO HARMONIZE APPROACHES TO AFRICAN PROBLEMS. SPEECHES OF BOTH KEREKOU AND OBASANJO STRESSED COMMON HISTORY AND CULTURAL TIES AND STRONGLY UNDERLINED NEED FOR AFRICANS TO RETURN TO BASICS, WHILE PURGING THEMSELVES OF ALIEN INTERVENTION (A CODE WORD WHICH MAY MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS -- MERCENARIES AND COLONIALISTS  
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PAGE 02 COTONO 01307 140530Z

IN COTONOU AND CUBANS AND SOVIETS IN LAGOS -- BUT WHICH IS CONVENIENT JUST THE SAME). PUBLIC REMARKS AND COMMUNIQUE PUT HEAVY EMPHASIS ON STRENGTHENING ECOWAS AS VEHICLE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION.

2. OBASANJO WAS GREETED AT AIRPORT SEPT. 9 BY HUGE CROWD THAT WAS HAPPY AND SPONTANEOUS; NOT NOTABLY REGIMENTED OR MILITANT

IN COMPORTMENT. MILITANTS WHO DID SHOW UP IN WELL ORGANIZED FASHION AT HALL OF SPORTS IN LATE AFTERNOON TO HEAR EXCHANGE OF SPEECHES SEEMED EQUALLY AFFECTED BY EXCELLENT JAZZ BAND WHICH PUNCTUATED CEREMONIES, BY STRIDENT ANTI IMPERIALIST CADENCES OF KEREKOU, AND BY DIGNIFIED, QUIET WORDS OF THANKS COUPLED WITH APPEAL TO AFRICANS TO CLOSE RANKS ON PART OF OBASANJO.

3. SATURDAY EVENING WAS OCCASION OF THOROUGHLY BOURGEOIS SIT-DOWN BANQUET FOR 350 WITH SIX COURSES, 3 WINES, AND CHAMPAGNE. EXCHANGE OF TOASTS SAW A RELAXED AND JOVIAL KEREKOU RECALLING POST INDEPENDENCE ECONOMIC COOPERATION, DETAILING COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS, TOUCHING LIGHTLY ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN PROBLEMS, THANKING NIGERIA FOR SUPPORT DURING MERCENARY INVASION, AND ESCHEWING ANTI IMPERIALIST THEMES. OBASANJO IN HIS REPLY SAID NIGERIA FOLLOWED EVENTS IN BENIN VERY CLOSELY AND IN AID SIDE WAS PREPARED TO RESPOND TO NEW REQUESTS. CONDEMNING MERCENARY ATTACK, OBASANJO UNDERLINED AGAIN NEED FOR AFRICANS TO SOLVE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS AND RESIST FOREIGN INTRUSION FROM WHATEVER QUARTER.

4. SYMBOLIZING BILATERAL COOPERATION OBASANJO AND KEREKOU VISITED PORTO NOVO SEPT 10 TO DEDICATE NEW BADAGRI-SEME KPODJI ROAD.

5. COMMUNIQUE ENDING VISIT SEPT 11 EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH CLOSE RELATIONS AND DESIRE TO IMPLEMENT FULLY ALL AGREEMENTS  
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PAGE 03 COTONO 01307 140530Z

BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES IN PERFECT COOPERATION. PARTIES WOULD WORK FOR ACCELERATION IN IMPLEMENTING ECOWAS. ON AFRICAN ISSUES THEY EXAMINED AREAS OF TENSION, EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT IMPERIALIST MANEUVERS, SUPPORTED PATRIOTIC FRONT, ENDORSED UNSC EFFORT ON NAMIBIA, AND AFFIRMED BACKING FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS. SAID OAU SHOULD TAKE BIGGER ROLE IN LIBERATION STRUGGLES. COMMUNIQUE CONDEMNED ANY INTER AFRICAN FORCE NOT UNDER AEGIS OF OAU. ON MIDDLE EAST COMMUNIQUE LIMITED TO EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT FOR "ARAB PEOPLE." COMMUNIQUE DID NOT PICK UP KEREKOU'S PUBLIC REFERENCES DURING VISIT TO CAUSE OF SAHAROUI PEOPLE. IT PROMISED REGULAR CONSULTATIONS ON ALL MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST AND SAID KEREKOU WOULD GO TO LAGOS SOMETIME ON RETURN VISIT.

6. SEASONED OBSERVERS SAY OBASANJO VISIT WAS MOST CAREFULLY ORGANIZED YET RELAXED AND AGREEABLE CEREMONIAL EVENT HERE SINCE MERCENARY INVASION TIGHTENED THE SCREWS IN JANUARY 1977. KEREKOU SEEMED TO RELISH FRATERNAL AFRICAN AMBIANCE. OBVIOUSLY PLEASED WITH THE WAY THINGS WENT AND TO HAVE PRESTIGIOUS VISITOR AT HIS SIDE FOR TWO DAYS, HE BANTERED WITH CROWDS AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN EASY GOING FASHION. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION SO FAR ON WHAT WENT ON BEHIND THE SCENES BUT CASUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH

MEMBERS OF NIGERIAN DELEGATION SUGGESTS THAT NIGERIANS, WHO ARRIVED HERE TIRED AFTER STOPS IN CONAKRY AND LOME, WERE SURPRISED TO FIND COTONOU LESS GRIM AND BENINESE MORE OPEN AND RELXED -- PERHAPS MORE AMENABLE TO FUTURE POLITICAL COLLABORATION -- THAN EXPECTED. OUR INTITIAL IMPRESSION IS THAT IF NIGERIAN OBJECTIVE WAS TO DRAW THEIR SOMEWHAT ERRATIC FRANCOPHONE NEIGHBOR CLOSER INTO LAGOS' ORBIT, SIGNAL TO BENINESE MATERIAL ADVANTAGES IN BETTER BILATERAL TIES, AND TO SHOW THAT NIGERIA CAN BE A USEFUL COUNTERWEIGHT TO SIVIETS, CUBANS AND OTHERS, VISIT WAS VERY MUCH WORTH THE EFFORT.  
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## Message Attributes

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